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Health & Wellness

What Women Should Know About Strokes

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What women should know about strokes

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There are a few things that women should know about stroke. More women than men suffer from stroke each year, 425,000 compared to 370,000. Stroke kills twice as many women each year as breast cancer. Black women have more strokes than Caucasian women, and stroke is the number one cause of death for Hispanic women.

Because stroke affects so many women, it is important to be familiar with the signs of stroke and seek medical help quickly. Women and men experience many of the same symptoms, including sudden numbness or weakness of face, arm or leg, confusion,



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difficulty speaking, problems with vision, loss of balance or coordination, trouble walking, or severe headache for no known cause. Other telltale signs of a stroke that are unique in women include Please turn to **STROKE 19B**

Black women have strokes more than any other race; be familiar with stroke signs

STROKE

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the rapid onset of hiccups, nausea, fatigue, chest pain, face and limb pain, shortness of breath or heart palpitations.

Both women and men share many of the same risk factors for stroke. While a person of any age can have a stroke, risk does increase with age. In fact, the chances of having a stroke double for every 10 years after the age of 55. Other risk factors include a family history of stroke, high blood pressure or

cholesterol, smoking, diabetes, being overweight and not exercising.

Women also have some exclusive risk factors that could raise their risk of having a stroke, which include:

- Taking birth control pills
- Experiencing natural changes in the body during pregnancy that increase blood pressure and put stress on the heart
- Using hormone replacement therapy to relieve symptoms of menopause
- Being postmenopausal and having a waist that is

larger than 35.2 inches and a triglyceride level higher than 128 milligrams per liter

• Being a migraine headache sufferer

Women can take an active role in preventing stroke by monitoring their blood pressure, not smoking, getting tested for diabetes, knowing their cholesterol and triglyceride levels, limiting alcohol and maintaining a healthy weight. Usage of birth control pills are generally considered to be safe for young, healthy women. However, they can raise the

risk of stroke in some women who are over 35, smoke, have diabetes, and high blood pressure or cholesterol.

Although there is no cure for a stroke, there are treatment options available. The most common types of strokes, which are strokes caused by blood clots, are called ischemic strokes. This stroke usually occurs due to blockage of a blood vessel in the brain by a blood clot. Strokes of this type can be treated with a clot-busting drug such as tPA, or tissue plasminogen activator. In order

to be effective, the medication must be administered within three hours of the initial onset of symptoms.

Other treatment practices may include prescribing anticoagulants, such as coumadin and antiplatelet drugs, such as aspirin. These may be prescribed to help prevent a stroke in people who are high risk. In other cases, surgery may be recommended to treat or prevent stroke. Carotid endarterectomy can be performed to remove fatty deposits that clog the

carotid artery in the neck. If a person does have a stroke, rehabilitation can help rebuild strength, capability and confidence to continue daily activities.

If a stroke occurs, seek medical attention immediately by dialing 911.

North Shore Medical Center's stroke program has been awarded certification from the Joint Commission as an Advanced Primary Stroke Center.

To learn more about stroke care, call us at 305-835-6000.